Molly The Drummer Boy

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Harriet T. Comstock

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Molly.– Frontispiece.

He's Coming . . . We are Saved! Saved! Saved!

MOLLY, THE DRUMMER BOY

A STORY OF THE REVOLUTION

BY

HARRIET T. COMSTOCK

Slowly the mist o'er the meadow was creeping,
Bright on the dewy buds glistened the sun,
When from his couch, while his children were sleeping,
Rose the bold rebel and shouldered his gun.—*Holmes.*

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A Word Before Beginning

MOLLY was an odd name for a boy, you will say, especially for a soldier boy, and a brave one at that. But before you can understand, you will have to read my story. When you have finished I feel quite sure that you will do what I did after reading the bit of old history; give a hearty thought of thanks to the brave drummer, who, during the war of the Revolution, passed like a gleam of brightness, fun—and alas! sadness through the scenes of war and bloodshed; winning the friendship of all, the esteem and consideration of General Washington himself, and lastly a page or so in history. From the past I lead you forth, oh! hero of long ago, and present you to the hero and heroine lovers of to-day, feeling sure that a warm welcome awaits you.

HARRIET T. COMSTOCK.

MOLLY, THE DRUMMER BOY

CHAPTER I.

HOW DEBBY LOST HER FATHER.

BEFORE there was a Molly, there was a Debby Mason, and with her we must deal first.

One July morning, over a hundred years ago there stood in a forlorn room of a log house in Plymouth, a tall, severe looking woman in rich apparel, and a ragged desperate child of fourteen. On the floor in a drunken stupor, lay a man.

"See, lass," said the woman, "there lies thy father quite drunk. Look at thyself; in rags thou art, and shamefully neglected."

"But I love my father!" Debby blazed forth, "and when he awakens who, pray, is to care for him if I go away?"

"But I tell thee, child, he hath joined this wild crew who are headed for Boston, and thou wilt be turned on the town."

"'Tis a lie!" screamed the girl, "he did not know when he promised. He would not leave me, but even if he did he would come back, he always does!"

Mrs. Lane paused, not knowing how further to explain the truth to the wild child.

"Lass, hear me, for thy mother's sake I am trying to save thee. I never knew her story, but she was a lady. In meeting, thy case hath been considered, thy father is no longer to be tolerated in the town, he must go, and I have taken thy care upon myself."

Debby stared in bewilderment, then slowly the truth dawned upon her.

Old Thomas Martin had been ordered from the town, and poor Jack bound out to Elder Morris. It was quite plain, her father was to go also, out into that somewhere of silence and absence, and she was bound out to Mrs. Lane like a slave; she, proud, free Debby Mason!

"I won't go with you!" she shrieked, "I'll go with father! He loves me, and, and beside I promised mother!"

Just then the man upon the floor stirred and roused; after many exertions he sat up. One look at his little daughter and Mrs. Lane steadied him.

"Good morning!" he smiled foolishly; "I'm afraid I've taken a drop too much again. Debby, child, don't take on so, I'm going away so that I won't disgrace you any more. There's going to be trouble sure as you live ,and I'm going to fight. If I come back, lass, I'll be a man."

He arose clumsily and stood before the woman and girl with downcast eyes. Debby grew white to the lips.

It was true then. He was going away. After all she had borne and suffered for his sake, he was turning his back upon her, leaving her to fare as she might. Little poor Debby knew of patriotism, or the new talk of war and a republic; she had not even that hope to help her bear this blow.

Just then, down the street came a straggling company of men and boys headed by a drum and fife. As they drew near Mason stood straighter and taking from the wall a rusty gun, staggered to the door. Mrs. Lane drew Debby back.

"Come on, Mason," called the men; "if they don't want you in Plymouth, you'll soon be wanted out yonder. There's plenty of room in Boston for men like you and us."

Mason reeled on. Debby could not let him slip from her with-

out one more struggle. She broke away from Mrs. Lane and ran after the swaying figure.

"Father!" she cried, "take me with you! I love you! I love you! Remember what mother said!"

The man stood still, sobered for a moment by that magic name.

"Lass," he whispered putting his arms about her, "all they said in the meeting was true. I'm going to be a man, so help me God for her sake and yours—or I won't come back!"

"Come on Billy!" yelled the crowd, "Deb can do without you!"

Clinging to her father poor Debby's rage and despair rose. She shook her fist at the laughing mob.

"You're a mad lot!" she cried, "the whole town is mad to take my father from me. I curse you all! I curse you every one for what you have done!"

The men laughed loudly.

"Bring your drum, Deb, and come along," called one. "You need not part with the old man. You're as good as a lad any day, and a better fighter I swear than your daddy. Come on and drum us to victory."

Debby stooped and picked up a stone, then flung it into the crowd. An oath came from the man hit and in the excitement Mason, with bowed head joined the yelling rabble.

"Shame on thee, lass!" cried Mrs. Lane laying firm hands on the sobbing girl, "who would ever think thy mother was a lady? The town hath done well to try and save thy soul and body. Thou art possessed of a devil. Follow me!"

The door of the wretched home was closed. Nothing mattered any more. Meekly enough Debby followed her rescuer up the hill to the white house on the top. Poor Debby! in the neat

home, with plenty to eat and decent clothing she was absolutely miserable.

Since her mother had died five years before she had led a wild uncared-for existence. Among her father's rude companions she had shared food and drink, when there was any, and had gone hungry and cold without complaint when times were hard.

In Mrs. Lane's well ordered life and home, she was a worse outcast than amid the poverty and shame. There she had at least the love of the poor wretched father who, when he was sober, remembered the past, and lavished affection upon her. With Mrs. Lane she was watched, distrusted and whipped for misdeeds, and under the new order of things her soul and body were in a very bad way indeed. With a burning longing she fretted in silence for news of her father, but how could she hope, in Mrs. Lane's loyal home, to hear of the doings of the wild rebels who were defying their King and his laws?

It mattered little to Debby whether her father was Whig or Tory, no matter what he was she hungered for him day and night.

There was one other thing Debby hungered for, that was her drum; it had been her one childish toy, the treasure of lonely years.

She had always longed to be a boy, and her drum was the concession her father had made to her desire.

Upon it he had taught her to beat so clearly and in time, that she had become famous among his boon companions.

But there was no place in Mrs. Lane's house for such an unmaidenly thing, and to save it from destruction, Debby had hidden it behind the old home in a bit of woodland. Thither she sometimes ran when life pressed hard, and with muffled sticks, beat frantically upon the blessed comfort.

During the year which dragged drearily away after Mr. Mason left the town, Debby learned to do some useful things in her new home, and she grew straight and tall and strong; but her heart was hard and bitter. Strange as it seemed though, in all her misery in the prim existence, she remembered her mother clearer than ever before, and snatches of old talk and scenes came sharply to her mind.

It had not always been such a sad life as Debby had last known with her father. Once the home was neat and cosy, and dimly an old story,—a story never finished, floated through the girl's mind.

"Some day, child, when thou art older," it was the mother who had spoken, "I will tell thee of my home. Perhaps we'll write a letter, they may like to see thee, little lass. Try to be a lady, dear, then they will not be ashamed of thee." Things grew confused as Debby tried to think, but there was one night that was ever clear. It was the last night of the clean happy life. "Be a lady, Debby child, and whatever happens stay with father like a good maid. Save him, dear, he was a fine man once. He will tell thee the rest of the story some day."

How vividly Debby remembered clinging to the poor mother and sobbing out the promise to stay with father. After that scene all was confusion and misery. The untold story was never finished or asked for. Uncared-for and neglected poor Debby became an outcast among decent children, and the butt of the reckless ones.

And so it had gone from bad to worse until the town had ordered Bill Mason from the village of his adoption, and had bound Debby to Mrs. Lane for five years.

CHAPTER II.

DEBBY TAKES HER OWN WAY.

"DEBORAH?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Hast thou aired thy bed and prayed in private, earnestly seeking forgiveness for thy sins of yesterday?" Mrs. Lane came down the long hall and eyed with disapproval the girl sitting idly on the top step of the porch.

A sullen look passed over Debby's face. "I've aired my bed," answered she.

"And humbly besought pardon for thy sins?"

"No, ma'am."

"Why not, Deborah?"

"Because I haven't been sinning."

"Child, thy soul is in danger of eternal punishment!"

"I don't care." Debby had suffered so much in various forms during her short life, that the subject had ceased to interest her.

She never trembled as did the well cared for little Puritans, over Elder Morris' prayers. His lurid descriptions rather charmed her. There seemed no doubt in Plymouth but that Bill Mason was doomed, and where her father went, Debby wanted to go too, consequently no threat could touch her.

At the hard words Mrs. Lane grew more rigid. "For thy mother's sake I have sought to save thee," she said, "I have even tried to trace her family for I believe they were of better stock than thy vagabond father, but I fear me, lass, that thou

art an evil hearted wench. Neither hell fire or earthly love can move thee. Mistress Knowles hath told me that over and again thou art seen with Jack Martin; thou art a shameless one!"

"Jack was my only friend when all the other boys and girls turned on me, 'tis not like I'd forget Jack." There was a dangerous flash in Debby's eyes.

"I forbid thee ever speaking to the rascal again. Dost hear?"

"Yes."

'Wilt thou obey?"

"No." A cruel blow almost threw Debby from the porch. She gathered herself up and turned a set, white face to her mistress.

"Now go to thy room, Deborah, for the love of thy soul have I chastised thee. After evening prayers to-night I will come to thy room. If thou art repentant, I will overlook thy insolence, but mark my words, dost thou repeat the offence, girl, I will lay the rod across thy shoulders, until I have conquered thy spirit. During the day," she added, "think of thy mother, and of how she would have grieved o'er thee."

Debby had had a hasty answer ready for Mrs. Lane, but the last words quieted her. Silently she shuffled to her room on the second floor far to the back of the house. Closing the door she sank down near the window and began to think in real earnest. The day wore wearily away. Strong, energetic Debby chafed under the enforced idleness. She thought of her mother, and hot stinging tears filled her eyes.

Here was her chance to be decent and respectable slipping from her, while she was growing worse and worse. She thought of her father away somewhere—where, she knew not, though she had pleaded with Jack Martin to try and find out. What was the poor, weak father doing?

Perhaps he was dead, and she would never see him again!

That thought always made her strong young body quiver. Bits of strange talk, always hushed when she drew near, came to her now in those long hours of imprisonment. Rumors of a battle at Lexington where the farmers had dared face the King's men. It had never occurred to Debby before, but perhaps her father was among those brave men. Or, perhaps, he had been at the later battle of Bunker Hill, and had fallen fighting in the unequal struggle, as so many other rebels had who dared to resist King George.

Debby hated the King for no better reason than because Mrs. Lane worshipped him. If she had only been a boy she would have fought against him simply to spite her mistress.

The tall clock on the stairs, after plodding through the weary day, at last struck seven, and the early gloaming began to settle o'er the little town of Plymouth.

From below the droning voice of Mrs. Lane arose, leading the evening devotions. How Debby loathed that service. In half an hour Mrs. Lane would mount the stair, rod in hand, to settle her account with the imprisoned sinner, and in half an hour, at a certain woods of which Debby knew, that rascal Jack Martin would be in waiting with any possible knowledge he might have gleaned of her father, and in return be given a lesson on the drum. Jack had warlike aspirations and Debby was fitting him to take his place, with *her* drum, to serve where her sex prohibited her going. Poor limited Debby; no one ever knew what the sacrifice meant to her.

As the hour struck she rose restlessly. Of course she must meet Jack, but she did not care to encounter the eyes of Mistress Knowles, who, if she ever sought forgiveness for her own sins, did so when all Plymouth slept.

Suddenly the girl started up, her strong rosy face full of fun. Why had she not thought of it before?

She ran to the closet and mounted a short ladder; from the space between the ceiling and the roof she dragged down a bundle and flung it upon the bedroom floor. Then she worked rapidly.

The bundle consisted of a suit of boy's clothes made of rough fustian. It represented all the money earned and given since she had lived with Mrs. Lane.

Jack Martin had procured the outfit, never asking a question about the strange purchase, though at the time he was consumed with curiosity.

For a month it had lain in its hiding place, having been brought forth once or twice at midnight, and donned in silence, that Debby might know the unholy joy of making believe she was a boy.

She now dropped her trim gown and skirts upon the floor, and drew on the rough suit. Up went the curly brown hair under a three cornered hat, and lo! in the soft gloaming stood as sturdy and brave a lad as one need wish to see.

"And now!" laughed Miss Debby doubling her fists at an unseen foe, "come on you old cat of a Mistress Knowles, there is another rascal in town to-night who would like nothing better than to close your eyes for a week or so!"

CHAPTER III.

ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF DEBBY.

IT was no great thing for Debby to clamber from her bedroom window to the ground below. She had done it more than once with her skirts on; in this approved apparel anything seemed possible, anything but being a lady. That hope was done with forever. She had crossed the line now. Before her lay—she hardly knew what—but the thought chased the fun from her face.

Ah! Debby, misguided little maid, as you turned your back on what your dead mother had wished you to be, she was perhaps nearer to you than ever before. With tears filling her dark eyes, the girl fled along. Down the long hill and across the meadow which lay behind the old deserted log house and divided it from the woodland. And there at the edge of the woods stood Jack Martin awaiting his belated comrade.

He saw the boy approaching and was filled with alarm at the sight. If Debby came now how were they to get out of the scrape?

"Hello!" he shouted to the oncoming stranger, "whither away so fast?"

"On the King's business," panted the boy as he drew near. Jack gasped.

"Your name?" he faltered, "and pray what business have you with me?"

"Robert Shirtliffe is my name, gaby, and I arrest you in the

name of King George the Third as a traitor to your country and for trying to corrupt the mind of one Mistress Deborah Mason, a young and innocent maid!"

"My God!" gasped Jack, and sank upon the Autumn leaves at his feet.

Then such a peal of laughter rent the air that the birds stirred in their nests.

"Oh! you coward!" panted Debby. "A gallant soldier *you* would make. Any Tom, Dick or Harry could arrest and carry you off like a sack of meal. I vow I've a mind to give you no more lessons on the drum. 'Twould be just making it possible for you to fall into prison. A drummer boy, indeed, Jack Martin. Better don my gown Sir Babykin, and let me go in your place!"

Jack had arisen in his anger and chagrin and now stood glowering before Debby.

"Shame on you, Debby Mason!" he cried, "a bold jade you are and a disgrace to the village!" Then eyeing her closer he added, "but a fine, handsome lad you look, girl. I doubt if your own father would know you. But I have half a mind not to tell you the news to pay you for this unmannerly prank."

"And I," mimicked Debby, "have half a mind to tell the meeting of your bravery."

"I've taught you to read, Deb, when the schools shut their doors on you." Jack was capitulating, "and I've brought you the news. Beside," with a resumption of his airs, "if you tell on me, how can you explain your own share in the business?"

This reduced Debby to her proper place at once. "I'll not tell, Jack, but what is the news? By your face I know you have heard much."

"Wait until you hear Deb. The battle of Lexington has made every man brave. Thousands of men joined the army at once and rushed on to Boston. They'll drive every Britisher into the

harbor!" Jack's voice shook with excitement, "Yes; every King's dog of them shall die. But"—his eagerness waned—"there has been another battle since. The report of our men winning at Bunker Hill was wrong. But it was a glorious fight. On, on came the British with bayonets pointed, not one of our men flinched; when they came near enough they gave them volley upon volley. I tell you, Deb, every rusty gun spoke true that day!"

"Oh!" gasped the girl, "oh! if I were *only* a boy. Go on, Jack, go on!"

"Well, they fought until their powder was all gone. Not a man fled; when they could fire no more they used their guns for clubs, and rushed upon the foe!"

Jack's tones grew shriller as his feelings rose. "They were driven back, but they fought as they went, and they died with their faces toward the enemy!"

"All of them?" panted Debby.

"No." Jack half moaned, "they are behind entrenchments at Prospect Hill. They have been there all Summer, but Deb, George Washington has been made General of the army, and he's coming to get our men out!"

"George Washington?" cried Debby, "why Mrs. Lane says he is the worst man she knows. I heard her tell Mistress Knowles." Jack laughed, "Wait, lass, he'll drive the British before him. Elder Morris has had a letter from Abner Andrews. 'Twas a wonderful letter. I listened at the door to hear it read when they thought I was feeding the cattle."

"Why, Jack," Debby interrupted, "Abner Andrews went away when father went; does he—speak—of—father?" The question came slowly, it seemed to mean life or death to her. In the twilight Debby saw the excitement and flush die from Jack's face.

"Tell me everything, Jack Martin," she groaned, "don't you hide a single thing."

"He was in Abner's regiment," whispered Jack. "He was wounded at Lexington, but not much. He doesn't drink now, Deb, and he thinks of you a lot. Old Morris wasn't going to let you know for he is afraid of Mrs. Lane; and there was something in the letter about wishing he'd told you the rest of a story for fear something might happen to him."

"Did he?" Debby braced herself against the tree, and in the dusk Jack, and all familiar things were blotted out.

"Did—he—say—that? And—he—thinks—of—me—and he does not—drink—any—more? Oh! father!"

The year of suppression and heartache rolled away. From the almost forgotten past came the words: "Stay with father, Debby, like a good little maid."

Had she been a boy nothing would have kept her from following, like a dog, at his heels. Drunk or sober she would have stayed with father. Out somewhere, alone and wounded, he was thinking of her, and trying to be better for her sake.

And she? why she was becoming a bad girl; a girl who was whipped and half starved at times, yet never growing better.

Should being a girl keep her longer from the only one who loved her and could make her happy? No, a thousand times no!

"Jack!" she sobbed, her eyes blazing, "I am going to father! I am going to be a drummer boy myself! See to it that you keep my secret. If you tell, and I am brought back, I'll, I'll—but you won't tell Jack, I know you won't, not if they should drag your tongue out!"

"Go!" cried Jack, "*you* in that boy's toggery? I won't let you!" He stood in her path.

"Won't let me!" The girl towered above him in her anger,

"if you stand in my way Jack Martin, I'll knock you down! Where's the drum?"

Jack pointed dumbly to a clump of bushes, and stood aside.

"If *you* go, I'll cut too," he cried at last. "What do you suppose this old town means to me without *you* and the drum?"

"Well, follow lad." Debby was fastening the drum round her body. "I reckon they will need all they can get; but here or there keep my secret, Jack, and in the end you will be glad."

"I promise, Deb." Two hands clasped in the gathering gloom, and then without giving the accustomed lesson, the new recruit ran through the little wood, and so was lost to sight.

All who went away, took that direction; once clear of the town instructions as to how to proceed might be asked; just now there was nothing to do but run.

Back to the village, with bent head and empty heart, strode Jack; and up in the little back room of Mrs. Lane's orderly house, lay a heap of crumpled clothing; all that was left of Debby Mason who was soon to be known as the black hearted ingrate, too evil to be followed and striven for.

CHAPTER IV.

AND NOW WE COME TO MOLLY.

FOOTSORE, weary, and hungry, a boy beating upon a drum, entered the headquarters of the bedraggled army entrenched on Prospect Hill.

"What do you want?" asked a man on duty.

"I wish to join the army and fight the foe. I can drum."

"I hear that you can. Stop the clatter, wait until your accomplishment is needed." The boy put the drum gladly down.

"What's your name?"

"Robert Shirtliffe, sir."

"Age?"

"I'll be eighteen soon."

"You look much younger. Where do you come from?"

"Plymouth."

"You come with your family's consent?"

"No one had an objection to offer, sir, we are all patriots."

"You wish to enter the service as a drummer?"

"With your permission, sir."

"Well, I will enter your name, and make further inquiries later. You'll probably be ordered to New York, Washington needs more troops. You look strong."

The boy drew himself up painfully. "I am strong," he murmured, "and I'm not afraid of work."

No further investigation was made. The country too sorely needed men, and so Robert Shirtliffe became a drummer in the

American army, an enemy to his King, a traitor to the old order of things. When he first went among the soldiers, he shrank from the unusual scene.

"Hello! Molly," called one, noticing his hesitation, "where's your mother?"

Robert shrank back as if he had received a blow, the others roared with laughter.

"Oh! don't flare up, boy," said the speaker, "the army's full of Mollys or Betsys, when your beard comes we'll call you John."

Robert breathed again, and took his place among the men. But the name clung to him. His beard came not, and he could only hope that by some brave deed he might efface the title.

Not long after he had enlisted he was sitting, with some others, around a camp fire trying to forget, in the grateful glow, how hungry and cold he was, when suddenly a bit of conversation riveted his attention.

"Any one heard of old Mason yet?" asked one. "I heard that General Lee had tried to trace him to thank him for his bravery." Shirtliffe drew nearer: "I used to know an old fellow by the name of Mason down Plymouth way," he said, "a poor drunken old chap." The words came slowly, and with an effort.

"They say this old fellow drank like a fish before he enlisted; something has sobered him up since."

"What did he do that was so brave?" Shirtliffe asked the question as he bent nearer the fire.

"Why you see it was this way; when the folks 'round Boston made up their minds that the King did not mean to grant their petition, they hustled their stores and ammunition to Concord. Old Gage got wind of it and sent eight hundred men to stop them, and bring everything back, Samuel Adams and John Hancock into the bargain. But the King's men were too late;

Adams and Hancock were out in the country raising a devil of a row and stirring folks up.

"Just about that time Revere and Dawson started out, and then Mason got his blood up and said: 'Now whose going to lead and stand by the bridge with me when the British come?' "

"And how many stood by him?" Robert's voice shook, and his ruddy face paled.

"About a hundred and thirty."

"Thank God for that! But oh, if I had only been one!" There were tears in the boy's eyes.

"Never mind, Molly, you'll get your chance. The new country will have to claim much good blood before it wins. The British have us fast and tight in here now. If General Washington doesn't come soon God help us all!"

"Go on about Mason," Robert interrupted, "news doesn't reach down our way."

"Well, Mason and his men waited by the bridge, but the British didn't come. So they separated and agreed to gather when the drum should announce danger."

"Oh! if it had only been *my* drum! Oh! if I had only been in time!" A sob shook the eager voice, "but go on, go on, I am a fool to stop you."

"About five in the morning the drum rang out, but only seventy men stood by Mason then. Up came Pitcairn with his fellows. 'Ye villains!' he shouted, 'throw down your arms!' He spoke to them as if they were dogs, but Mason and his band stood firm. Pitcairn then aimed his pistol and yelled 'fire!' Sixteen of Mason's party dropped like one man."

Shirtliffe staggered to his feet, "And afterward, when it was over, where was Mason?"

"Everyone thought him dead. He was seen falling, but he was not among the killed, nor among them who got away. A

good many beside you, Molly, would like to know where the brave old fellow is to-day."

Robert turned from the group, one thought filling his mind; he must find Mason; until he had done that nothing mattered.

The camp was in great excitement. Floating rumors came now and then to the effect that General Washington was on his way to rescue them, but nothing definite could be learned. Cold weather and lack of food had caused much suffering during the Winter, and all that kept the patriotic hope and life together was the possibility of the new General getting there in time to save them from the British, then holding Boston, should they descend upon them in their weakened state.

Robert, inured to cold and hunger, had borne up under the seige wonderfully, he was stronger than many, more able to undertake a difficult or dangerous task, he then, must exert himself to find the missing hero and bring him back to honor and reward!

Day after day the desire grew upon him, and he sought in various ways to elude those in command, and get out upon the roads leading to Boston and see if he could find any trace of his man. One day he succeeded in escaping the watchful eye of a sick and half-frozen sentry and gained a road upon which he had never been before. It was a bitter day in March, and to keep his blood in circulation, the boy stamped his feet and beat his hands noisily as he went along. Suddenly a voice checked him:

"What—you—doing, hic—give the countersign—hic—or I'll shoot!" Robert's heart stood still. A little beyond, by the roadside, leaning heavily against a tree for support, stood Mason, the hero patriot, the long lost man whom even General Lee wished to honor!

But a sad spectacle he was now. Half drunk, his old Conti-

nental uniform in rags under a long English great coat, and a British officer's cap set sidewise on his matted hair.

Seeing Robert pause and gaze, the sentry by the tree gained dignity and staggered toward him, then he laughed: "You were long enough in coming, lad," he said, "I'm nearly frozen. What you doing in those togs?" he questioned, looking sharply, "changed your ideas with your clothes and want me to follow? Lead on, I'll be glad enough to get back to American quarters. Got some whisky?" He came quite close to Robert now, and a queer light grew in his dull eyes.

"Wha—at's the matter—hic, going to turn your back on me, after what I've told you? You look more than ever—hic—like my girl. Come give us a drink!"

Shirtliffe saw that Mason mistook him for some one he knew, and was puzzled.

"Don't you—don't you know me?" the boy asked in a broken voice.

"Of course I know you Captain Morley, even in those clothes, come boy, pass out your flask."

"Come with me," groaned Robert, "how did you get among the British after your splendid deed?" A blur passed over Mason's eyes. His senses became more muddled.

"Get here? You ought to know better than I, captain, hic—but I'm not going to tell you anything more, hic—until I get whisky. Good whisky you've got and plenty of it. I'd sell my soul for a drink." A half sob choked the words, and Mason's hands stretched out in piteous pleading.

Robert turned his head away, bewilderment and horror keeping him silent.

"Some day, lad," Mason was crying openly now, "I want you to go to Plymouth—and—find—Debby—pretty—Debby Mason. 'Pon my soul she's enough like you to be your sister,—

hic—I wonder if it—could—be—possible—but no, it could not be. Here—give me a drink, I'm choking—what—what was your mother's name lad? I've been trying to ask you that ever since I first saw you. Whisky! whisky! quick!"

"Sentry, who goes there?" A clear young voice startled the shivering drunkard and Robert alike.

"I told you not to drink until I got back, I trusted you. What have you got, a prisoner?" Down an embankment by the roadside a young man came half running, half sliding. As he drew near, the two in the road gazing upon him in speechless surprise.

"God help me!" groaned Mason, "there are two of them!"

And Robert saw before him in British uniform, one so like himself that the resemblance made his brain reel.

"What ails you both?" the new comer asked, "staring like a pair of idiots at me as if——" his eyes rested on Shirtliffe and he staggered back, "who are you?" he questioned, "and what in heaven's name do you want?"

"I'm an American," Robert's voice sounded like an echo of the other's, "and I've been looking for him"—pointing toward Mason, "I'm going to take him back to where he belongs. You've kept him drunk since you took him prisoner, and made him a traitor to his country, but I'm going to save him. Let us pass!"

"Not so fast my gallant rebel," laughed the young Britisher, "you American gentlemen are worth keeping; your information is valuable. The old patriot there, was willing to talk for whisky. Now what's your price, you come fresh from headquarters?" he placed himself insolently in front of the pair and folded his arms.

"Stand aside!" said Shirtliffe, in low tense tones, and, laying his hand on Mason's arm he took a stride forward.

"You might as well let us go, Captain Morley," Mason's puzzled face turned from one to the other, "I don't—know—what's come over me—I can't think clear, but something tells me to go—with this—one," he clung childishly to Robert's hand.

"And I say once again, stand aside," Shirtliffe's eyes were dangerous, "you Britishers have no price which will buy some of us. From this poor weak fellow you have succeeded in getting information, but it was a coward's trick; he is loyal still at heart, and he goes back with me!"

"You rascal!" a stinging blow in the face made Robert stagger, but only for a moment. The strength which had thriven upon neglect and Puritan rigor, blazed forth at the insult, and with unlooked-for power he flung himself upon Morley.

Mason grew soberer as he stood looking at the struggle. So alike were the two that but for the difference in dress, one could hardly have been told from the other.

Was it a dream? Old memories came flooding o'er the man's weak brain, and his eyes cleared.

"Stop!" he called in a voice shaken with agony. "My God! boys, stop until I can think!"

But the two combatants paid no heed. Blows fell thick and fast, and the breath came hard. Morley's trained muscles had all they could do to stand up against Robert's blind fury. Then, too, Shirtliffe was slightly taller, and he used that advantage well.

"Surrender!" hissed Morley through clinched teeth.

"Never!" Robert's voice quivered and broke into a sob.

"Then by heaven, in the name of the King!" Morley sprang from his antagonist and drew out a pistol, "die like the traitor that you are!"

A sharp report rang out. A stinging pain in his left hand

made Robert reel, but he forgot it when he saw Mason, who had run toward them in a last effort to separate them, sway and fall over. The ball which had gone through Shirtliffe's hand had found a resting place in the old man's breast.

"Coward!" shrieked Robert, "I was unarmed;" then kneeling beside Mason he moaned, "he is dying! Leave us alone, he comes from my town, I have something to say to him."

The pleading face touched the young Englishman's heart. "I only did my duty," he muttered, "but I'm sorry about him. Remember you are my prisoner, if I leave you for a time, may I trust you to remain here?" Robert nodded, and Morley strode away. When he had passed from sight Shirtliffe bent his head over the whitening face upon his knee. Kisses and tears he showered upon it, and the touch brought consciousness back to the dying man.

"Lad," he whispered, and Robert saw that he still mistook him for Morley; "go to Plymouth and find Debby Mason. Tell her that her father died—like—a—soldier. Tell her only that. Don't let—her—know—that I failed—I tried for—her sake—but I failed. I always failed. Then there was"—the weak voice trembled, "something I wanted to tell her, but I can't remember all. Her mother had a twin sister, as like as you—and—my girl! It is so strange, so strange, where is that other lad?"

Shirtliffe almost dropped the heavy head upon his arm. "Kiss me! Kiss me!" he sobbed, "oh! do not leave me!" But Mason's life blood was gushing out and he was going fast. "Quick," he gasped, "when I am dead, they will give Debby a chance—they always said if I—were out of the way they would look out for Deb and her mother—I'll soon be out of the way"—a wan smile flitted over the ghastly face; "there's no one now, but Deb."

The evening shades were beginning to close in the dull March

day, and in the gloom the dying man raised a last look to the face so near his own. For one moment near things lost their hold upon him; he was back in the old life with his neglected little girl. "Debby, child, I've been drinking again, to-morrow I'll tell you the story. Kiss father, Deb, and good night!"

The rigid upturned face seemed the only thing in God's universe to the boy looking down upon it.

"Good night!" he sobbed, kissing the icy lips—"good night, good night!"

The words died away on the chill wind. Robert stood up and turned his face toward the direction Morley had taken, "and now I must wait," he sighed.

CHAPTER V.

WHILE MOLLY WAITED, HE LISTENED.

SHIRTLIFFE waited beside the road, until the pain in his hand turned him sick, but Morley came not.

Then a strange fear crept into his numb heart. Suppose he should faint and be found unconscious by either friend or foe! The thought made him dizzy. He must hide. If he were conscious when Morley returned he could come out to meet him, if not—well in that case he were better out of sight. Painfully and slowly he clambered up the embankment and crouched behind a rock hidden among underbrush.

Then he drew forth his hand to examine the wound. One look, and he lay as dead to sight and hearing as the man by the roadside below.

The cutting winds of the March evening swept o'er him. Morley returned, and not seeing his prisoner gave a sneering smile and hurried away. Still, Robert lay among the bushes heeding not.

But at last he revived, and turned vaguely about, a voice from the road fell on his ear, it was not Morley's voice.

"The fellow's dead, I tell you. Shot through the breast. It looks like an American's nasty trick. Morley was to watch this road to-day. I wonder where he is?"

A second voice drawled out: "Morley's too young to be given much rope, he needs watching. As for those rebels, my Lord

Howe is too lenient with them. I'll shoot every one at sight from this day on. Are you rested Dick, by Gad! we must hurry on with the news, and bad news it is."

"I could go on," replied the first speaker, "though every bone is aching, but look at the horses."

Shirtliffe peered over the ledge and saw a sorry pair of horses jaded and panting and near Mason's body stood the riders, travel stained and weary. They were Britishers and had evidently ridden fast and far upon important business.

"While we wait," said the man called Dick, "let us carry this man behind the bushes since we cannot bury him. I wonder if there is anything on his body to identify him by. Here lend a hand Norton and search the old fellow."

Robert shuddered.

"There'll be little time for burying," said the man addressed, "when Washington and his ten thousand men make for Dorchester Heights.

"Fourteen thousand," broke in the first speaker, "yes; there'll be hot fighting. I wish every reb was as stiff as this one, and that we were back in England. What was that?" The two men started nervously as a stone rattled down the embankment. Robert, in his excitement at what he had heard, had made a misstep and dislodged it.

The listeners could take no chances, however. "Speak or I'll fire!" called the older man whose name was Norton. Shirtliffe leaned over and showed himself deeming it the safer action. The men saw him and in the waning light took him, as Robert desperately hoped they might, for Morley.

"Hello!" cried the man called Harding, "what are you doing there, Morley, hurt? you're as white as a sheet."

The strange resemblance was to serve him well, now, if only the Englishmen were not too intimate with the real man, and

the darkness and his keen talent for mimicry would help him out. He must chance it at any rate; so slowly descending he made his way toward the men.

"By jove!" laughed Harding, "he's in Continental dress, his officers say he's always up to some deviltry, what are you doing now, Morley?"

"On the King's business!" answered the boy clinging to the shadow of the hill.

"While you have been riding for days to find out Washington's movements, I've gleaned information nearer home."

Norton looked searchingly at him. He had heard of the dare-devil boy Morley from others in camp, this was his first encounter. "You could hardly get your news from yon dead Britisher," he said, "perhaps you will be kind enough to explain yourself and your new uniform."

"Oh! the uniform is all right." Robert gave a dry laugh, "it got me inside the American lines. As for him"—the boy gave an agonized glance at the dead man," he is no Britisher. Look under his coat and see what uniform he wears."

They bent and turned back the long coat, and sure enough there was the tattered Continental suit, which, during his time of backsliding. Mason had had neither chance or inclination to change.

"Upon my soul!" cried Harding springing to his feet," this looks like mischief!"

"I was trying to capture him"—Shirtliffe's thoughts had never been clearer, and his words seem to flow unconsciously, —when a cowardly knave fired at me"—

"From ambush?" asked Norton keenly.

"How else?" Shirtliffe replied, "but as I was saying, when the ball went through my hand I saw my prisoner falling; I

quite forgot my own hurt until all was over, then I went up the bank to"—

"Here's some water, Morley," Harding interrupted, taking the thing for granted, and producing his bottle, "you'd find little water up there, everything's frozen stiff. Let's see your hand, boy. There is mischief on foot, and we must hurry on."

Shirtliffe, keeping his face turned as if wincing at the touch, gave the wounded hand to the young officer.

Every moment was precious. The real Morley might return at any minute, Robert did not know he had come and gone—and although he had promised to wait until his return, under the circumstances he must try and get away, and not be taken into the camp of the Britishers and presented to them who knew the true Morley better, and to Morley himself. That would mean sure death, and in Robert's breast lay a secret which would give life and hope to the suffering army of men in General Lee's command.

"You shiver like a girl, Morley," laughed Harding, as a nervous tremor went over Shirtliffe's body; "the men in your regiment have talked of your nerve; it can not all have oozed out of this little hole. There, I'll wrap it in my handkerchief until you get to the surgeon. Better go on slowly, we'll overtake you. You look fit to faint."

"Perhaps Morley better take one of our horses and ride on; he's lighter than you or me. My horse is about done for, and can go at a trot at the best." Norton looked sharply at the boy, "The sooner you get back to your own officers, the better, lad, you're too young to be trusted far; you'll get into mischief yet. Go as fast as you can, tell General Howe that Washington is advancing with fourteen thousand men. His aim is at—"

"Yes, yes," Robert broke in, for a rustling among the dead leaves, added to the pain in his hand, made him quiver.

"I know, Dorchester Heights, you forget I have listened too! Which horse? Quick! anything more?"

He sprang to the saddle, and the tired horse jumped as the weight touched his sore flesh. It was none too soon. The rustling among the leaves was no scurrying animal, as Shirtliffe, with bowed head dashed on, Morley on his return beat, came up to the group:

'My God!" cried Norton and Harding gazing open mouthed at him.

"Who was that riding away so fast?" asked the new comer, a sickening sensation creeping over him.

"It was—it was—great heavens! how do we know! We thought it was you, Morley!" The boy ground his teeth; "It was an American," he hissed.

"And by thunder!" roared Norton, "we've sent him into his own camp with the news of Washington's advance, on the only good horse among us!"

The situation was too much for the three men. In silence they gazed into each other's faces and grew sick with apprehension.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW MOLLY BORE THE NEWS.

WITH lowered head, and throbbing nerves, Shirtliffe dashed on in the direction of Boston, but as soon as safety permitted he turned the jaded animal, and breaking into a woodland road, retraced his steps, and with a sobbing appeal to the disappointed brute, struck out for the American camp.

"Good horse!" he pleaded, "get me there in time! only that and then we shall both rest!"

For one moment he thought of the quiet figure by the road which he was leaving forever, but he dared not give a second thought. Wrapped in the costume of two countries, poor Bill Mason might, or might not find a grave dug by stranger hands; be that as it might it was now the duty of Robert Shirtliffe to bear to the suffering, hopeless patriots the news for which they were yearning.

What were his hopes and sorrows now?

It was in his power to put strength in sick bodies and joy into hundreds of sad hearts!

On, on, plunged the great brown horse. Night fell, and the moon shone calmly down on the tired boy urging and coaxing the animal to its uttermost. The distance, by direct route, from where Robert had left the men, was probably not over seven or eight miles, but in the wood road, it was longer, and to the excited boy the miles seemed endless. Every noise made him chill

and hot in turns. A feeling of weakness frightened him. He had fainted *once* that day, God keep him from another attack! At last he reached the American lines, and a sentry stopped him. He gave the countersign and dragged on.

A strange dizziness came over him as he neared his destination. He had never known such exhaustion before. A laugh startled him, and he was even more startled to realize that it was his own laugh.

"This must be death," he thought, remembering the death he had but lately seen. "I can not think clearly." Then he knew that he could not wait to reach General Lee's headquarters, and oh! he had wanted to so much! He must make the best of what time and strength he had left.

"He's coming!" he shouted sitting upright in the saddle. "Washington and fourteen thousand men! We are saved, saved! saved!" Again the wild laugh, his laugh, made him shiver. The horse too, took fright and dashed ahead forgetting its weariness.

"He is nearing Dorchester Heights! Hear me! hear me! We are saved, we are saved! Ha! ha! ha!"

Hear him? Why the world had heard.

White, haggard faces clustered about him. Lean hands clutched at the bridle of the foam covered horse. Torches flashed from every quarter, and questions poured upon him. Only one answer he returned, "Washington is near. We are saved. I swear to God!" And every time he repeated the words they became more distracting until he laughed and sobbed them out again and again.

"See, he is falling! Some one catch Molly, God bless the boy!" The faces clustering around him faded into a quivering circle of white; the torches flickered and went out; an awful

agony took possession of his last conscious thought,—he was dying among all those men!

* * * * * * *

"Just a drop more, lad, now put back your head." Shirtliffe swallowed the burning drop, and felt it thrill through his cold, numb body. He was too weary to open his eyes or to care what became of him, but suddenly a voice from among the others first startled, then stilled his breath.

"He comes from our town. Let me take him—I tell you we—were—boys—together!" Robert opened his eyes. Near by stood a new volunteer, ragged, pinched and worn. They were constantly working their way into camp, but the sight of this one caused Shirtliffe both joy and despair.

He smiled feebly into the anxious face of the boy pleading to be allowed to care for him.

"Hello! Martin," he whispered, "I'm all right. When did you get in?" The men standing around, seeing that the fainting spell was over, turned to join the excited groups and discuss Robert's wonderful news. Sick men had become strong, weak hearts, brave, and over the entire camp a joyful atmosphere of expectant waiting pervaded everything.

Seeing themselves comparatively alone, Shirtliffe motioned the new volunteer nearer.

"I'm Robert Shirtliffe," he whispered, "call me Bob, you can remember that?"

"Yes," replied the boy, "and oh; but I am glad to see you Bob!"

"That's right," Shirtliffe gave a half laugh, "if you ever think you are going to forget, Jack Martin, run away or do something—you understand?"

"Ye—e—s Bob!"

"Did you have a bad time getting here?"

"Ye—es. Bob—I've been trying for months. Have you found *him*?" Jack bent closer. In the darkness he could not see Robert's face, but he felt the boy grasp his hand, then a hot tear startled him.

"What's—the—matter—Bob?"

"Bend down, Jack, let me cry just once. He's dead, Jack, dead! He was shot by a Britisher who looks so like me, that I have got to find him. There isn't anything left in all the world Jack, except for me to find the other boy!"

"Some one is coming! Here, Bob—laugh, swear,—do anything,—but cry."

Robert sat up, and threw off the blanket which thoughtful hands had laid over him. The man approaching was an officer and had come to thank the boy who had ridden so nobly and so well to bear the welcome news; but ere he reached the crouching pair upon the ground a volley of distant firing rent the still air. Again, and again it came.

The men listened until the truth broke upon them. The rumor was indeed true, the seige was over, the new general had come in time to save them!

Shirtliffe never received the thanks of the approaching officer, the universal cry of "Washington" from those hundreds of weary, ill-fed men was return enough for all that he had dared and done.

No one thought much of him during the next few days. He recovered with the care of the new recruit, Jack Martin—as well as might be expected, and the excitement kept up his spirits.

The relieving army marching toward the Heights of Dorchester made themselves heard by their continuous firing. The sound put new life in the hearts of Lee's men and the men shut up in Boston, but it made anxious the beseiging Britishers.

There was to be no skirmish this time. This meant battle, and a big one.

Lord Percy, after receiving the news which had been delayed by Shirtliffe bearing it to the enemy, set his men in order and proceeded to Castle Island. He intended opening battle upon the afternoon of his arrival, but a great storm came up. The wind blew and the rain fell and a thick fog covered all. My Lord Percy thought best to wait until the following day before beginning the attack. Washington, who ever made his successes out of other men's failures, lost no time. He went among his men personally, exhorting them to avenge the Boston Massacre of a year before, and drawing a vivid picture of the waiting patriots now looking to them for aid. His words fell on eager and willing ears. All the day and night of the terrible storm they worked and planned; strengthening their fortifications and planting their guns in favorable positions.

When Lord Percy looked forth after the storm he beheld such an imposing defense that all thought of an assault was abandoned, and my Lord Howe was driven to the sad extremity of giving up Boston to the foe.

But Washington was noble in his bloodless victory, he permitted the British to leave the city without an attack, providing they did not burn the town.

To this they consented and on the 7th of March they sailed out of the harbor. On the 20th of March, Washington entered the city at the head of his army and was greeted, as perhaps no other general had ever been before, by the ragged loyal men who had suffered so bravely for the good cause.

It was at this point that a serious question arose between Robert Shirtliffe and Jack Martin.

Washington's first step after entering Boston was to make stronger its defences, and among the men appointed to assist in

the task, was the regiment in which both the boys served. Jack was well pleased at the idea of not being sent far from all that had meant home to him, but Robert had but one desire left—he must find Morley! Mason's dying words rang in his ears day and night, and the strange resemblance meant a mystery he must fathom. After that?—well nothing mattered after that.

"But I say," Jack pleaded, "after all I went through to find you, it's a burning shame for you to go away."

"If I live, Jack, I'll soon be back. I'm sure to find Morley and then—there will be nothing left but for me to come back."

"Suppose you should get hurt again? You need me."

"I have thought of that," Robert's face grew serious, "I think of that all the time, old fellow, and there is only one way. If I am hurt a *little,* I can bear it—alone—if it means a big thing—I have this!" And Shirtliffe drew out a pistol he had recently gotten.

"You dare not!" cried Jack in startled tones, "if you talk like that I'll—I'll tell!"

"No you won't, you'll stand by me to the end, even if I am far away. I won't do anything foolish, but I'm going to find that boy, I've got to, Jack. His life and mine is all confused, and I'm going to try and find out. It may help Debby Mason, you know. I'd rather like to help Debby;" a quick smile lit up the boy's earnest face, "the folks in Plymouth town did not think much of Debby, but I'd like to save her from—Mrs. Lane, and give her one more chance. Shake hands, old friend, when I come back we'll go and find Debby Mason together."

Silently Jack gave his hand, and the two parted.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE CHRISTMAS.

ROBERT SHIRTLIFFE sat beside a frozen stream binding a cloth around his frosted feet. The shoes were in tatters, and the bare flesh showed through the gaping rents in many places. His clothing, too, was worn and thin and but poorly protected him from the cutting blast. As he bent over his painful task, for one moment his strength faltered, and he almost wished that he had gone back to New England, with the other men whose term of enlistment had expired, and whose faint hearts had not been loyal enough to again pledge themselves for further service. The wish was but a fleeting one. Go back? What had he to go back for? All that he had in life to look forward to, lay near—if it existed at all. For during the time which lay between his leaving Boston and now as he sat beside the Delaware river in New Jersey, Shirtliffe had not seen, or heard of Morley. But even with the memory of disappointment and bitter suffering to keep him company on this Christmas eve, Robert was proud to think that he had been one of the three thousand men who had remained with their glorious leader. For never was general loved by his soldiers, more than was Washington. What they suffered, he shared. When their hearts grew faint, by his inspired courage he lifted them to new heights of loyalty and hope. Where danger threatened, there was he at the front. His massive form a target for every enemy's bullet, and a mark of nobility for his followers. From

afar Robert had seen and worshipped. In his young heart the love for this great man amounted to a positive passion. To serve him, though his services might never be known, was the daily wish of the poor New England boy. The wish was strong within his heart now and helped to keep back the stinging tears of agony which lay near his tired eyes.

The men with whom he had been tramping in search of food, had gone on ahead, and Robert sat alone. Presently a step startled him, and he glanced up. Down the shadowy road, leading his weary horse, strode a tall figure with bowed head, and moving lips. The boy on the path sprang up, all pain and misery forgotten; he stood ready to salute, for well he knew that gallant form. Never before had he been so near. The moment was fraught with keenest joy. But the approaching man saw him not. He was praying. It was no new thing for Washington to plead for help from a mightier power, all his men knew, and honored him, for his childlike faith.

"Bless us with wisdom in our councils, success in battle, and let our victories be tempered with humanity. Endow, also, our enemies with enlightened minds, that they may be willing to restore liberty and peace. Grant the petition of thy servant for the sake of him thou hast called thy beloved Son; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. Amen."

The splendid head was raised and in the gloaming the clear eyes rested upon the boy saluting by the road.

The great general paused: "Good evening lad," he said, " 'tis but a sad Christmas time for young boys like you."

Robert tried to reply but his voice failed him.

"Were you wishing for home? You look ill and worn. I will send you back."

"No, no, sir!" Shirtliffe found strength at last, "I was but

binding up my feet, my shoes are not thick enough for these rough roads, but I am strong and loyal!"

Washington smiled, and then looked pityingly down upon the wrapped foot, the blood already was showing through the new bandages.

"Here, my son, take my handkerchief," he murmured, "it will help until you can procure better, and take this coin; when it is possible, buy strong shoes."

Robert accepted the gifts with flowing tears, and put them in his breast.

For a moment there was silence, then the deep voice added, "The Marblehead fishermen are down the river about five miles, could you reach them in an hour with a message?"

"Yes, sir," Robert's chance had come. He would deliver the message in an hour or die in the attempt.

"Well, simply tell them we are ready."

Robert bowed, saluted, and then stifling a groan as he hurried away on his bleeding feet, he ran into the gathering twilight and was lost to sight.

In less than an hour he had reached his destination. The Marblehead men understood the message. They had done splendid service in the war before when bravery on the water was needed, they were ready now. They set to work to get every boat in their possession in readiness and all that night and the next day, soldiers on horse and foot advancing from every direction made for the river. The plan had been worked out in secrecy, and now upon this Christmas night the entire army enlarged by recent reinforcements was to be ferried over the icy Delaware in order to attack the British in Trenton on the morrow. It was a mighty and daring attempt, but not a patriot questioned the leader who had planned it. For ten hours the brave fishermen rowed to and fro in the darkness bearing their

suffering loads. But,—even while many were frozen—and all endured untold agony from exposure and scanty covering, not a complaint was heard to pass the brave lips. The army was divided in three parts, but with joy Shirtliffe saw that he was in the command under Washington which was headed for a spot nine miles above Trenton, from which point they were to bear down upon the unsuspecting Britishers, then making merry over their Christmas cheer. Shivering and crouching in the stern of one of the boats, Robert thought of all the Christmas nights he could remember. There had been a few which had been bright and joyous—but this one so full of pain and loneliness, was the proudest one of his life.

The division under Washington reached the opposite shore with slight delay, the others were less fortunate, but by eight o'clock the next morning Washington's command and one under Sullivan dashed down upon the astonished Britishers, who were just resting from their revels, and shook the town by their yells and shots.

The maddened Hessians sprang to line and tried to resist the oncoming foe. Wild excitement prevailed, and above the whizzing of shot rose the triumphant shouts of the ragged, half frozen patriots. In the thickest of the fray rode always the mighty commander, his clear voice calmly calling out orders, and his steady hand pointing his sword. With eyes ever fixed on that brave form, Shirtliffe stumbled and struggled after, hoping that standing or falling, at the end he would not be far behind his hero. And another thought mingled with that,—he must keep *one* bullet, in case he fell badly wounded,—he never forgot that.

The fight was fierce, but short; in an hour a thousand of the foe were begging for mercy; the others had fled toward Bordentown at the first alarm.

So Washington gathered his forces in Trenton and the British fell back to Princeton. Cornwallis then took command determining that the "old fox," meaning Washington, should not find *him* napping and get away, he, the great Cornwallis meant to put an end forever to the exploits of this daring rebel! And indeed it seemed likely that he might be successful for sickness and cold were enfeebling the patriot army day by day. Their splendid courage strengthened by their late victory bore them up during the after days of suffering, but Washington realized that he must act promptly and wisely if he wished to hold what he had so hardly won.

He could not recross the river. His proud spirit quailed at the thought of retreat, but to engage in another battle just then might mean ruin. In his extremity he called a council of war.

"Cornwallis is advancing," he said calmly, "our skirmishing lines have but driven the British back this afternoon. At daybreak the attack will be renewed. There is but one thing for us to do." The eager men listened breathlessly. The glaring red torch lights showed their faces pinched and wan. What was it Washington wanted them to do? Every man was ready to do it!

"We have but five thousand in camp," the calm voice went on, "we must leave to-night, make a circuit to the east, pass the enemy's flank, and make an attack upon the detachment in Princeton before Cornwallis can return to help them."

A mighty cheer went up. Robert from his place wedged in among the excited patriots, glowed and thrilled as he heard the daring plan. This was a general worth following.

A man to be loved!

"But"—he was still speaking, though the shouts had

drowned, for the moment, his voice, "there is one thing more to do, and for that I want volunteers."

Robert's heart almost choked him. Could there be any deed too great for him to undertake?

"While we steal away under cover of the darkness, others--perhaps fifty—must remain here to keep the fires burning and by beating the drum at intervals, deceive the enemy. At sun rise you may try to escape and join us. If you are taken it will probably mean death! Now who volunteers?"

The rich voice fell with a sad cadence, and for an instant no one spoke. Then, "I! I! I!" forty or fifty men disentangled themselves from the mass and pressed nearer. And from these a slim boyish form stepped close to Washington.

"Sir!" he said simply, "I have been a drummer since the war began, may I remain?"

For a moment Washington eyed the boy.

"I remember you," he said, "you have served me before. You are young to attempt this service. There are enough without you."

"But sir, I can drum!"

"So he can," called out a man from the crowd, "no one can drum like Molly!"

"And you wish to remain?" the general asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Your name, my lad?"

"Robert Shirtliffe."

"Age?"

"Seventeen."

"Your home?"

"I come from Plymouth, Massachusetts."

"Have you parents?"

"I have no one sir."

"You are a brave lad, and worthy of your country. Report to me as soon as you can"—the clear eyes grew misty—"you and these other loyal fellows shall be rewarded according to the quality of your sacrifice."

They saluted gravely. Then the stealthy arrangements began. Silently through the night, the men marched away bearing the stores and ammunition.

On their beats the British sentinels marched to and fro, feeling sure of the enemy.

And during those long solemn hours a handful of men kept alive the fires in the deserted camp, and a weary, but unflinching boy, beat almost constantly upon his drum. His feet pained him piteously and his stiff fingers could barely grasp the sticks, but his heart was staunch and true. As the night wore away his exhausted brain grew unsteady. All memories came to haunt him, and fill the empty hours.

He saw a still form beside a lonely road, he heard the last words of the dying man, "Go to Plymouth and find Debby Mason, tell her that her father died like a soldier!"

He could never find Debby now, perhaps. Ere another day had passed he too might be lying dead. He might never find the boy for whom he had searched since he left New England, never know the story!

Something like a sob mingled with the drum beats.

March British sentinels at your posts!

Behind those gleaming camp fires is a weak foe indeed. See! the morn breaks, the handful of men, forgetting the boy, have already departed to rejoin their comrades, only the faithful drummer remains!

Sleep well, oh! my Lord Cornwallis your last peaceful sleep for many a weary night. The old fox has caught even *you* nap-

ping and is now well on the way to intercept the force which you are so confidently expecting.

Beat the drum bravely, Molly my boy! See the sun is tinting the far east. Go with the others. Your task is done, and in the future loving hearts will arise to call you blessed for this night's work!

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER MESSAGE FOR DEBBY.

HE was alone! The others had departed. Washington had said that at break of day they might rejoin the army. The sun was streaking the sky and a chiller air stirred the bare trees.

Robert knew in what direction the army had gone, and, after eating the dry rations left over from his evening meal he hung his drum around his neck, and staggered away. His head ached dully and his body was stiff and sore, but he must not be found in the deserted camp. That would mean—certain death!

He laughed weakly,—certain death! if he could only be *sure* of that he would not fear so greatly, but suppose he was only wounded—and carried away a prisoner? Ah! God! *that* he could not stand! He pressed his hand against the pistol in his pocket, it was safe,—and his gun? Yes, it was loaded and in order. Sick and exhausted as he was he must make a break for safety. See! the sun shone among the trees!

Was it too late? A new strength came to him with the horror of the thought, and he bounded into the shadow and made for the direction the army had taken. On, on he ran hearing as he went the movement and stir of a distant body of men. It was the enemy awakening to the daily duties, and the lines would soon be pushing forward. Robert's brain reeled, and in coming to a cross road he paused to consider his course. There was a certain rock to guide him, but in his bewilderment and dazed condition he could not find it, and so took the wrong road.

"Who goes there?" The voice drove the blood from Shirtliffe's heart. After all this time, there in the lonely Jersey woods, he was to meet again the boy who had shot at him, and killed old Mason in New England.

"'Tis I," he faltered, as the oncomer bore down upon him.

"You!" Morley dropped the gun he had leveled at the foe and gazed in amazement at the face so wondrously like his own; "you! here! My God! are you a ghost to haunt me so? What do you want?"

"I want to get back to my people."

"Back to your people, you rebel fool!" Morley laughed the old scornful laugh; "your people are behind you! You are running away from them my brave lad. But it little matters, we have them tight and safe, come along with me, your people will join you later!"

"If I go," Robert's voice rang clear, "you will have to carry me dead. When we met before I was unarmed; like a coward you shot at me, and killed an innocent man. I am prepared now, let us fight honestly."

"Honestly?" Morley sneered, "much you know of honor. I trusted you once, and a nice trick you played me. I trusted the old fellow I shot, I put him on sentry duty, but he got drunk, the knave, while I turned my back. A fine lot you are, confound you!"

"Again I ask you. Will you fight?" Shirtliffe straightened himself. Time was passing. He would have given anything in his power to have solved the mystery of the identity of the boy before him. But what had he to give? His life. There was no time to ask or answer questions now. It was his life or the young Englishman's. He must protect himself and report to Washington if it were possible. He was young, and with all the misery life was sweet.

"Fight with you?" again the maddening laugh," fight a traitor? Surrender, or I promise you my aim will be truer this time." Morley raised his gun, but Robert was as quick, and the two weapons pointed at the same instant.

A flash! a sharp report—and then, silence! When Shirtliffe came to himself he was lying on his side across a fallen log. A dull pain throbbed in his left shoulder. He put up his right hand and felt that his coat was soaked with blood. The dampness and the pain made him faint, and again he lost consciousness. After a moment, though, the chill air revived him and he sat up. He would not touch the damp coat or think any more than was possible, of the wound, and perhaps he might get on to Washington. That was his first connected thought.

Then he remembered Morley. Where was he? Gone perhaps, thinking he had at last killed his enemy.

Well, the enemy was not dead. There might be time for another meeting, and an explanation. In the meantime he, the boy Washington had trusted, must try to gain the American ranks and claim his reward! He arose, swayed, but gradually grew less giddy.

He was young, and hope was stronger than his wound. Another effort; and this time he stood upright.

How lonely it was! The bleak wind swept among the gaunt trees making them moan and creak. If he should die there, who would ever bear the word to General Washington that he had faithfully performed his duty?

No! he must live, and get away from that fearsome place, the stillness was driving him mad!

"Help! for God's sake help!" It was not the wind moaning. Shirtliffe started. Again came the cry, "Help! help!"

Some one needed aid, he must find him and do what he could. Stumbling forward he reached a clump of leafless bushes, and

there, lying at full length where he had crawled after he was wounded, lay Morley!

Forgetting all, but his pity for the dying boy, Robert knelt beside his late foe.

He knew death when he saw it now, and in gentle patience he smoothed the curly hair from the clammy brow and waited for the last words. There was always something to be said.

"I thought you were dead that time!" Morley gasped the words, then gave a groan.

"Can I trust you with a message?"

"Yes."

"Well, since there is no one else I must, for I'm—done—for!" Robert shuddered.

"Write to Mrs. Deborah—Morley—Fountain Terrace—London—can you remember?"

"Yes; yes."

"My mother! Tell—her—I—died—like—a—soldier,—like father!" Shirtliffe shook his head to free his eyes of the blinding tears.

"Tell—her—" the voice was but a whisper now, "that I did not find—Debby Mason, and if"—here the boy rallied and made a last effort, "if you ever go near Plymouth, find a girl named Deborah—Mason and say that—by going—or writing to my mother—all will—be forgiven. You hear me?"

"Yes I hear." The tears could no longer be shaken away.

"Where are you?" the groping hands found and clung to Robert's, and the boyish mouth smiled as sweetly as if the dearest face on earth were bending over him. "Good bye," he whispered, " you won't forget—anything? and I can trust you?"

"You may indeed." Shirtliffe bent and kissed the cold face as tenderly as a woman might have done. Reverently he clasped the slim hands over the still breast, and closed the lids upon the

smiling eyes. In the future he was to tell a heart-broken mother in England of how her boy died, and he thanked God for that smile.

Under the wintry sun Morley lay sleeping, and beside him sat Robert, lost in dazed thought. There were two messages now for Debby Mason, and there was a report to make to General Washington. He must be up and doing. But still he sat there with his eyes fastened on the young face smiling so placidly in its unbroken sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST OF MOLLY.

LONG did Shirtliffe sit beside Morley, repeating the messages over and again. No fear of forgetting them, he could remember naught else. As the day wore on he began to realize his condition and he knew if he ever expected to reach Washington's army, he must move on. In the distance he heard heavy firing and the sound guided him. He felt sure that the Americans had met the reinforcements coming from Princeton and that a battle was in progress. The thought stirred his blood, and he struggled to his feet, gave a last glance at Morley and went on mumbling to himself, "Tell Debby Mason!" Weaker and weaker he grew and as his mind cleared, a sense of his danger absorbed him. Was this death? This strange, unusual weakness? At any moment he might fall and be unable to rise.

The firing was growing less, the battle perhaps was over, fleeing parties of either friend or foe might soon be passing.

Never had life seemed so precious, as now when it was going so fast. Dimly he recalled how he had saved one bullet for this hour, should he use it now? Oh! no. "Help! help!" he sobbed, falling on his knees, "help! help!" He had walked further than he had realized, and the men who in the morning had left the deserted camp without him, later in the day missed him, and were even now searching the woods in hope of tracing him.

They heard his weak cry from afar, and, guided by the second call, reached his side a moment after he had fallen.

"It's Molly!" said one of the two men who found him, "look at the blood!" cried the other, "the boy is terribly wounded."

"This is an ugly wound," said the first, noticing the dry blood, "here, take his feet, Hall, let's get him to the surgeon's. He stayed behind to beat the drum, didn't he? Brave little chap, I suppose the devils found and shot him."

Very slowly and tenderly the men bore their burden to the rough field hospital, and the surgeons in attendance, after a hasty examination, said quietly: "The boy is done for; make him comfortable over yonder, there is nothing else to do for him, poor fellow." Their hands were too full to permit of them wasting time over uncertain cases.

So it was that Robert was laid upon a rough cot, covered with a coarse blanket and left to pass out of life as calmly as he might. One of the surgeons, however, did not forget him. He was a young man, full of ambition and was to return in a week to Philadelphia with a record of bravery and courage to cheer him during his furlough of rest. As he went about his duties, Shirtliffe's white face haunted him, "There might be a chance for the boy." he thought, "as soon as I can I will take a look at him again."

The opportunity came late at night, and then as quickly as he could he sought the bed upon which Robert lay.

A nurse in passing saw him pause, and stopped to say, "Bob's gone, Doctor Bell."

The surgeon bent over the cot. A smoking lamp shed a yellow light over the fair face on the coarse pillow. Fair it was, but not with death's pallor.

No breath seemed to come through the closed lips, however, and Doctor Bell put his hand over his heart.

Then with a start he drew back! The nurse had gone on, he was alone!

Again he bent close. A faint flutter stirred against his hand, and *under a bandage bound firmly around the body!*

Doctor Bell rose to his feet. "Nurse," he said sharply, "help me bear this—boy—to my tent, I'm going to save—him!"

It was the hardest struggle the young surgeon ever had. He gave up the long looked for furlough, and beside his other duties cared for and watched the boy in whom he had grown so interested. No hand but his operated on the ghastly wound, or touched the suffering body afterward.

For two days Shirtliffe knew not what was passing around him, but on the third day at sunset he became conscious.

Doctor Bell was beside him, his finger upon the weak pulse.

As memory returned a puzzled, then a horrified expression grew upon Robert's face.

His eyes fastened themselves upon the physician's bowed head, and a tremor shook him like a chill.

"What will become of me?" he groaned.

"Nothing;" the calm voice filled the quiet place.

"Get well now, as soon as you can be moved I am going to take you to my mother!"

"But, but—"

"It is all right. Trust me."

In a few days Shirtliffe's splendid constitution regained its tone, and he began to improve rapidly. Then Doctor Bell further surprised those who had time to observe him by giving up his comparatively comfortable quarters to the lad he had saved from death. How Robert appreciated this considerate act, no one but himself could know. To meet the surgeon as seldom as he now did, was torture untold. He knew that he must speak, but day after day he put off the painful task. At the close of

the second week, one day, Doctor Bell came in to make his accustomed call; he saw at a glance that Shirtliffe had reached the uttermost bound of endurance and with a courtesy for which his memory should be enshrined, he took the boy's thin feverish fingers and said simply:

"Your bravery and courage must win the respect of all. You have served your country nobly. Why you entered the army under a false name, you best know. I respect your reasons and thank you for the service you have rendered."

Robert bowed his head and wept over the friendly hand.

"And now," the sympathetic voice sank lower, "what may I call you?"

"Just Debby Mason!" For a moment not a sound broke the silence but the sobs from the figure now kneeling at the feet of the doctor.

Then very calmly the man's voice went on: "Debby Mason, Washington has sent for you to thank you for what you did at Trenton. He will probably promote you for bravery; of course, you cannot remain in the army, it now is left for you or me to explain why an honorable discharge should be given you. Which one of us shall do it?"

Poor Debby could face death, had done so many times; she could bear cold and suffering but the idea of facing her hero and *explain* to him her awful deceit, was more than she could dare. But Debby was no coward even in this extremity,—availing herself of one of the privileges of her almost forgotten sex, she found a new way out:

"Write it for me," she begged, half smiling through her tears, "write it all, then I will take it and bear my punishment like—a man!"

"And afterward?" Doctor Bell questioned, "have you a home? any where to go?"

"No." The one word echoed through the early twilight like a moan.

"I had only one on earth to love—I followed him to the war —my father lies in an unknown grave near Boston—he died on my arm—but he never knew!"

Something blurred the surgeon's eyes.

"And then," in Debby's low voice there was little left of Shirtliffe's bravado, "there was one other, a young man in the British army—he looked so like me that my own father could not tell one from the other. That boy was looking for—Debby Mason—he died—by—my—bullet"—a dry sob choked the words—"but I have his mother's address. I think—from bits of an old story—and from his strange likeness—that that mother will have something to tell—me. But"—and a shudder passed over Debby, "how can I break the news to her, that even in self defence—I took her boy's life?"

The broken talk had interested Doctor Bell so much that now, when the tale was ended he drew a long sigh of relief. His thoughts were becoming burdensome. Strange relationships between British and American families were not as uncommon to his experience as to simple Debby's. He saw in the girl before him a heroine of no every day romance, and he meant to see the end of it. She had become an object of absorbing concern to him during the last few weeks, and he did not intend to let her slip out of his life without an effort to restrain her.

"I will write a full explanation, Debby," he said, "we can trust General Washington's good heart. After you have seen him, come back to me. I am going to take you to my mother, she is expecting you; and then we will write to England."

CHAPTER X.

DEBBY COMES INTO HER OWN AT LAST.

NEVER while life lasted did Debby forget how she felt, when weak from recent illness and present fear, she was shown into the presence of Washington.

She wore—for the last time—her continental uniform. It was mud stained, blood stained and ragged, but even so it was dear to her heart.

In her hand she bore Doctor Bell's letter. The contents she did not know, but she trusted the man who had befriended her—and she was ready to take the consequences of her wrong act. Tremblingly she raised her eyes to the calm, clear ones searchingly gazing into her face.

"You have been ill, my boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your bravery is greater than your strength. Before I tell you what I wish to do for you in return for your services, I will read the message you bring. In the meantime go outside, my servant will give you wine."

Thankful for this respite, Debby stumbled from the room. The minutes seemed hours, and the wine choked her; at last the summons came. With down cast head she entered the room to hear her doom.

Washington was standing with a folded paper in his hand.

"Here is your honorable discharge from the army," he said, and something in the low voice, caused Debby to look up. A

tear was glistening in the great man's eyes: "I have added to it a sum which will enable you to make a start in life. For your bravery I honor you, for your service your country thanks you, and my heartfelt wish for you is that God may bless you with sons as noble as their mother. May heaven's blessing go with you. Farewell my child."

It was over, and with a heart bursting with gratitude and worship poor lonely Debby Mason turned away to begin life.

* * * * * * *

A week later in the home of Doctor Bell's mother a tall, slim girl with short curls of brown, framing in a strong earnest face, stood listening to a dear, prim little Quaker woman, who was divulging a wonderful plan.

"Now thee looks sweet and womanly, Deborah. Thy locks will grow and thee must try to brush out some of the curl."

"Oh! mother," laughed her son coming in the room, "can you not spare the curl?"

"Nay, son, Deborah will be a happier woman, if her looks are not so unusual. And in a fortnight thee and I will go to thy people in England, the Spirit tells me that there thee will find peace and rest."

"But I will come back to my own land, my own dear country!" Debby's clear voice had not been toned down as much as her appearance; "I will come back to America. What was all the good of—of my suffering—and fighting—if I go away just as the glory is beginning?"

"Three cheers!" cried the doctor.

"Deborah, my son," the mother broke in.

"Well, Deborah, then, you shall see your people and choose for yourself, and—and—God bless you!"

Debby saw her people—sturdy wealthy folk they were, who

offered her a home and place where her mother as a girl lived and loved.

And she, in return, very tenderly told to the widowed mother of the boy who had died afar, the story of bravery and tragedy.

"He was your own cousin, child, and you took his life!" The words rang shrilly through the quiet room as the tale ended.

"He tried to take mine. He wounded me sorely twice." Even in her grief poor Debby tried to defend herself as she had always done in her honest fashion; "and he—took—my father from—me!"

The black robed figure straightened at the words and the empty arms outstretched to the shrinking girl:

"Oh! my child! my poor child! do not look at me like that! So looked your mother when we turned her from her home. Ah! lass, had I but clung to her I might have been spared all this!"

The arms were no longer empty. Hungry, starving Debby rushed to fill her mother's place!

"There! there! little maid, do not weep so sadly. We will go to this new land together, just you and I, and begin once again." Their tears were falling more gently now. "Try to love me, dear brave child, for I am very lonely!"

Try to love her! Why it seemed to Debby as if she had lived but for this blessed chance.

So they traveled to the land of Debby's birth, and in a quaint old house on the outskirts of Philadelphia, they began life just as the troublous war ended and the young republic reared its proud head. And into that happy home as soon as they could summon him, came that rascal Jack Martin, and he found there a welcome so loving and true that he disappointed all those who expected only evil of him and became gentleman Jack, and

a good foster son to the kindly woman who reigned so nobly o'er his life.

And by and by, when Deborah's face and form had rounded into perfect maidenly beauty, and the rich brown hair had grown to comely length and waviness, came Doctor Bell to tell his love and doubts.

"I need your help Deborah," he said humbly, "I love a woman true and sweet, but I fear her. A warrior maid is she, dauntless on the field of battle, and braver than any other whom I know. Can I hope that in the narrow limit of a home her free spirit would find space enough?"

There were tears in Deborah's eyes as she listened.

"In the chest in the attic," she whispered softly, "is a tattered suit, and old drum, and an army discharge. I know a maid, who, when her blood runs hotly, goes and kneels beside that chest. When she sees the drum, her hearts throbs until it almost chokes her. When she sees the discharge she bows her head in proud memory of one most truly to be revered and honored—but when she sees the blood stained suit her strength goes from her, and she only remembers one who led her from dark to light. from danger to safety."

"Deborah! is my home, then, wide enough for my sweet soldier maid?"

"Aye, 'tis as wide as life, as deep as love, and as high as heaven!"

So hand in hand they went to tell their story to loving waiting hearts.

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